

## Washington Embraces New Water Utility Technology

The City of Washington will be replacing approximately 6,000 of its 7,400 water meters throughout the city, beginning in late Spring. Existing water meters utilize moving internal components to measure the consumption of water which wear out over time, resulting in reduced accuracy. The new meters feature no moving parts and facilitate an automated meter reading process through the use of radio technology that will provide greater efficiency in meter reading, more timely leak detection and the ability to bill monthly rather than quarterly as requested by many residents. Over 1,000 meters have already been replaced during the rebuild of the last two years and approximately 500 will not be replaced in this phase because of the age of the meter; however in all cases radio technology will be installed.

The City has metered its water for over 50 years, with historical records indicating that the City first began metering its water with the construction of Water Plant #1 in 1960.

### **What is the process for the replacement? Do I have to be home?**

The City has contracted with HD Supply for the project and the actual installations will be done by their subcontractor – United Meters, Inc. (UMI). All residents who are scheduled to receive the new meters will be sent a letter from the City requesting that they call United Meters toll free to set up an appointment within a 2 hour window. Under normal conditions, the meter replacement will take approximately 30 minutes. We encourage everyone receiving a letter to respond promptly so the project may proceed in a timely, orderly and efficient manner. Please note that “radio only” installations will not require an appointment or inside access.

### **Will UMI employees be going door-to-door unsolicited?**

If UMI is in your neighborhood and hasn't received a call for an appointment, they may request an opportunity to replace your meter while in the area. All installers have been thoroughly background checked by our Police Department, will have appropriate photo identification on them at all times, and will be driving company marked vehicles.

### **How will the City transition from quarterly to monthly billing?**

All residents will receive a quarterly bill in **May for January through March 2016 usage** and in **July for April through June usage**. In **September, July and August usage** will be billed and **October will be the first monthly bill** that is reflective of one month's usage from **September**. The technology fee will not be applied until monthly billing is fully implemented in October 2016 as currently projected.

### **Why are we replacing all of the water meters?**

Actually we are replacing only the older mechanical type meters that were last replaced during the meter replacement program which began in the mid-90s. These mechanical type meters have wear components that can no longer be rebuilt and are nearing the end of their useful life.

Since 2013, the City has standardized on Sensus iPerl smart meters. These meters can be upgraded to radio read by simply replacing the exterior touch pad with a new radio transmitter.

### **My mechanical meter is still good, why is it being replaced?**

We recognize that some of our mechanical meters still have viable remaining life and we are holding back replacement of our newest 500 mechanical meters. Mechanical meters older than 2003 are not compatible with the radio system.

### **So once we go to radio read, do we still need a full time meter reader?**

Actually we don't have a full time meter reader. Quarterly meter reads are currently performed by one of the water department employees. Every three months, an employee breaks off for 4 to 6 weeks of meter reading. The conversion to radio read will allow the Department to monitor problems such as an interior leak or failing meter on a daily basis using a computer dashboard interface with preset monitoring parameters. The Water Department will also replace the 500 mechanical meters on a yearly scheduled replacement program before the next round of City-wide replacement.

### **Why do we need a radio system?**

Radio technology has been prevalent since the early 2000s. Over 2/3 of our surrounding communities have already adopted radio technology using a "drive-by" system. The City's system will not only leverage "drive-by" but will also be capable of fixed based reading with the addition of an antenna on the water tower transmitting hourly meter reads for aiding in leak detection.

### **How is this project being funded?**

Various funding methods have been investigated and presented to the City Council and a technology fee that will be included on the monthly bill is currently being proposed. The technology fee has been calculated to just reflect the cost of providing new meters on a defined replacement schedule of every 15 to 20 years. Various methods of applying a technology fee to maintain a scheduled meter replacement program were investigated with the following options:

- Option 1) A flat per meter fee of \$3.23 per month
- Option 2) A flat per account fee of \$4.50 per month
- Option 3) A distributed fee of \$3.85 for a single meter and \$5.50 for a dual meter

The consensus was to look to adopt Option 3, with a technology fee that distributed the cost in similar ratio as the recognized hardware cost of \$300 per household for a single meter & radio versus \$450 per household for a dual meter & radio.

### **Won't this make our water rates higher than surrounding communities?**

No. Actually a typical City of Washington water bill at 4,500 gallons per month is only \$18.54, or 50% of the local regional average of \$37.31 per month. Furthermore, even though sewer rates may be higher than surrounding communities, the combined water and sewer average bill of \$57.15 compares favorably to the regional average of \$66.88. The proposed technology fee will still keep Washington comparable to this combined water and sewer regional average.

Community	Typical Bill (4500 gal)		
	Water	Sewer	Combined
Morton	\$ 30.43	\$ 27.25	\$ 57.68
Pekin	\$ 35.79	\$ 26.58	\$ 62.37
Peoria	\$ 43.88	\$ 16.72	\$ 60.60
Metamora	\$ 45.42	\$ 16.71	\$ 62.12
Eureka	\$ 27.54	\$ 18.54	\$ 46.08
Germantown Hills	\$ 49.34	\$ 63.10	\$112.44
Northern Tazewell Water	\$ 28.76	\$ 38.61	\$ 67.37
<b>Regional Average</b>	<b>\$ 37.31</b>	<b>\$ 28.15</b>	<b>\$ 66.88</b>
City of Washington	\$ 18.54	\$ 38.61	<b>\$ 57.15</b>

### **Are you eliminating current assistance discounts?**

No, qualified senior citizen and circuit breaker rates still apply.